- January 2007 -

Tangled sheets and sweat, followed by sleeplessness and shivering. It would be dramatic stuff indeed if it weren't so commonplace these days. Draco Malfoy finally stopped trying to find a comfortable sleeping position and settled onto his back. Gray eyes opened and stared at the ceiling, counting handsome panels of an impeccably furnished bedroom. It was probably dawn, or close to it. He rolled over to grab his wristwatch off the mahogany side table. 4:46 in the morning. How nice of his nightmares to let him have a bit of a lie-in.

You could call him afraid of sleep if you wanted at this point, but he was in no hurry to try and slumber just now. He had just awoken from one of his *absolute favorite* trips down memory lane: the one where the Muggle Studies professor gets eaten by a giant snake on his family's dining room table, mere feet from him.

Draco threw his legs over the edge of his bed, and put his head in his hands between his knees. Deep breath. And another. And another. *You're still breathing. You're still here. I am in control of this.*

Dressed in a black suit for work and seated at the end of a long table, he found the energy to raise a cup of tea to his lips every few minutes. The impressive display of breakfast foods lay untouched before him. The house elves had, as they did every morning, clearly tried to entice him, but it was no use. Draco knew it would feel like ash in his mouth, and he wouldn't keep it down anyway.

He existed trance-like, lingering over a long-cold saucer of tea until past 7:30.

Coffee. He could muster the energy for a good, strong cup of coffee. *Keep your routine. I am in control of this.*

The smell of freshly brewed hot coffee was one of the scents Draco recognized wafting out of the cauldron of Amortentia in Professor Slughorn's potions classroom from his Sixth Year. Of course, he'd had some slightly more pressing things on his mind that particular year, and so he'd completely forgotten all about it. That is until he stepped inside a Muggle café not far from where he'd reenter the magical world via Diagon Alley.

It had been a test of sorts, at first. *Go out into the world. Spend some time among those different from you. You'll find people aren't so different after all.* Draco had deemed this absolutely rubbish Healer advice at first, but then decided to take it as a challenge. Why the bloody hell should he be afraid of venturing outside the magical world? He knew firsthand there were far worse things to fear.

So instead of taking it as the lesson in expanding his horizons (as he was intended to), Draco meticulously planned out his first ever visit to a Muggle establishment four years ago.

He'd apparated to a nearby alley and strolled up and down the block. Familiarity and comfort lie only a few blocks ahead where the Muggle world ended and the magical world began at the entrance to the Leaky Cauldron, but Draco was determined. He had gone to Gringotts the week before and for the first time in his life, exchanged wizarding money for Muggle currency.

The café seemed innocuous enough. A busy morning shift, people dressed for work (he assumed) bustling in and out to get their caffeine fix. He'd also been careful to forego robes in favor of a plain suit. Obviously, Muggle Studies had not been a part of his education, but he knew enough to at least dress the part.

As soon as he'd stepped inside, the scent memory from his previous encounter with Amortentia hit him powerfully, and he actually smiled. The fresh coffee smelled so good, and try as he might at home over the next few weeks, neither he, nor the house elves, had been able to replicate the quality of the brew these Muggles came out with.

Four years later, and Draco had his routine down. Once 7:30 AM hit, he'd apparate to the alley, straighten the tie of his suit, double check his inside breast pocket for his wand, then stroll into the café. The Muggles behind the counter definitely recognized him after all these years, but as he was one of the regulars, knew his habits by now. They knew which morning regulars wanted a friendly chat, and which just wanted their coffee and to be on their way, and Draco definitely fell into the latter category of customers. It was part of the reason Draco was so attached to the place.

He picked up his steaming cup, resisted the urge to also order a blueberry scone as he still felt a bit queasy, and took to his usual table. There, like he did every morning, he could bury his nose in scouting reports or any manner of Quidditch magazines (charmed to look like a Muggle newspaper), or just sit back and savor his morning drink.

This being one of the mornings he would describe as "not so great," he

nursed his coffee and tried not to dwell on the fact that he knew he looked awful. He'd always been pale, but a night of terrible quality sleep and the shadows under his eyes became shockingly prominent against his skin.

Coffee finished, he heaved himself to his feet to get to work. *Why, though? Really, what is the point of any of this?*

Draco didn't like how often he'd been thinking this lately. He quickened his pace to the office.

By the time he reached his small office and closed the door, he was practically panting for breath. He loosened his tie under his robes and tried to control his breathing, hands clutching the rim of his desk. *I am in control of this.*

He sat down once he felt calmer and pulled some memos toward him. *Routine, routine, routine, keep the routine. I am in control of this.*

The following morning, Draco's nightmares let him have until 4:48 AM. Another recurring favorite had taken over his dreams: the one where Voldemort made him torture the wandmaker, Ollivander. Draco reached over to grab his wand off the nightstand, trying not to think about using it on the man who'd made it for him and how broken he'd looked after several rounds of the Cruciatus Curse.

Draco forced himself downstairs for the performative task of sitting in front of breakfast food. He brooded over his tea until 7:30, then apparated to the coffee shop. He sipped his drink and stared at nothing. His eyes couldn't seem to focus on any of the reading material he brought with him. On to the office. Unfortunately there was no field work to be done this particular week, and he'd tried to bury himself in paperwork until the work day ended. *Routine. Routine. I am in control of this.*

On Wednesday morning, he woke himself up with limbs thrashing. His nightmares had taken him to the Astronomy Tower of Hogwarts, but in this version, he'd leapt in front of Snape's Killing Curse, and instead of Dumbledore's broken body falling from the tower, it had been Draco plummeting to his death. He had woke just before hitting the ground. It was 5:22 AM.

He stood in front of a gilded mirror in the bathroom, shaving razor in hand. He had finished his morning shave a few minutes ago, but couldn't put the razor down. He stared at the tool in his hand, wondering if it really could deliver a fatal cut to his wrist. Would it be painful? It was a very expensive, sharp instrument.

No one would care. Sure, the house elves would have to clean up after him, but would they really be bothered by it?

Mother would care. For a little while. Anyway, if she really wanted to continue this charade of the Malfoy family, she'd be here right now, wouldn't she? Not spending most of the year visiting with various relatives scattered about Europe.

Theo Nott would care. But when was the last time they'd even spent time together anyway? In fact, if Draco thought back over the past year, their weekly meet ups at the pub had dwindled significantly. Draco couldn't even remember the last time they'd gotten together.

He could almost hear Pansy Parkinson's reaction in his head. *"Did you hear about poor Draco Malfoy? I'm not surprised, really, he went completely mad after the fall of the Dark Lord. But did you know I almost married him?"*

Yes, that would be typical Pansy. Entertaining various high-society types with her creepy, older Bulgarian husband, gossiping about what it was like to attend Hogwarts with people like Malfoy and Potter during the second rise of You-Know-Who. Draco heard she had two kids already.

To the rest of the wizarding world, he would be a cautionary tale. *Have you ever heard of the Malfoy family? Those pureblood aristocrats who were in You-Know-Who's inner circle? Anyway, the last of their line just offed himself.*

Draco suddenly let out a snort of laughter. He just remembered the reason this blade was so expensive: it was charmed to only cut hair and would be unable to nick his skin.

Thursday was the worst morning of all. It was the nightmare in his rotation of horrifying memories that haunted him most. His whole body was shaking as he tried to forget the sounds of Hermione Granger's screams. The wide, fearful look she had shot him just as his Aunt Bellatrix pushed her to the floor of the Manor's drawing room. *Help me,* it had said, *please, help me.* But he couldn't. And he didn't.

His watch read 4:13 in the morning. The shaking finally stopped and was replaced with an inescapable dread. Draco would never be rid of these memories. Though it was going on 9 years after the Final Battle, he didn't see a way out of his own head.

He'd been this low before, of course. For the first year post-war he'd tried to drown himself in Firewhisky, Dreamless Sleep potion in combination with other brews, and the attentions of Pansy. But Pansy wanted to immediately start her life as the next Mrs. Malfoy, complete with outdated pureblood traditions and attitudes and soon got tired of Draco's melancholy ways. Draco got tired of her harping on about Mudbloods and blood traitors taking over the country and trying to rebuild the world, and what in Merlin's name had he ever seen in her anyway?

Dealing with Pansy's constant tirades about how the world was changing for the worse was, quite simply, exhausting. Didn't the stupid bint realize that none of it fucking mattered anyway? Where had all this blood purity nonsense gotten them? It got Lucius Malfoy a cell in Azkaban for life, along with most of their school mates' parents. Crabbe was dead. Narcissa was only free but for the grace of Harry Potter.

And Draco? A two-year probationary sentence that included an already-lifted international travel ban. Of course he also had vomit-inducing nightmares, mandatory healer appointments and was taking more medicinal and recreational potions than he could count.

So when Pansy opened her stupid mouth for the millionth time to whinge about muggleborns, Draco finally snapped. He'd probably been cruel, and called

her all sorts of horrible names, but he really needed to cut whatever fraying cord still tied them together.

She'd called him a junkie, a pathetic excuse of a man, and a stain on his family name. Draco had laughed in her face and said if she were so intent on marrying a traditional Malfoy man, well he knew the Azkaban cell number of her perfect match.

The next few years were spent in a haze of Dreamless Sleep potion addiction, more healer appointments and once he'd passed his NEWTs (remotely, of course), he got the hell out of his mother's new home. The Ministry had seized Malfoy Manor immediately following the final battle at Hogwarts, since it had obviously served as the home-base for the Dark Lord's sinister operations, and Draco couldn't care less what happened to his childhood home.

Draco thought if he could get away from that horrible place, he'd be able to breathe. And this had worked, for a time. But his nightmares never stayed away long. Draco even kicked the sleep potion addiction and got himself a job. He could picture his father's curling lip and sneer if he knew Draco worked for a living. Malfoys didn't work. It was beneath the landed gentry of pureblood society to have to *earn* a living. While he certainly didn't need the gold, Draco did need something to occupy his time or his thoughts were going to burn him up from the inside and turn him into the shell of a man he'd barely avoided becoming.

Lucius was dead, anyway. Some days, like today, Draco envied him.

The dead had it so easy. They didn't have to watch their entire life crumble around them. They didn't have to haul their bodies out of bed each morning knowing that the world would be a better place without them.

Because the nightmares never left.

Draco couldn't make it until 7:30 AM. Routine be damned, he needed his coffee now. He apparated an hour earlier than normal, hoping the café would be open and was relieved to see it was lit up and serving patrons. It was much less busy this early in the morning, and Draco was able to sit at his daily table without bothering to subtly cast a Muggle Repelling Charm.

Draco sat at the same table every weekday morning. It was the perfect spot in the café. Set a few tables in from the window, so he could see out and watch people walking by without them noticing his stare, plus far enough away from the door but with a clear view of it. Draco had developed a habit of clocking every exit in any room he entered.

The ceramic mug was hot and comforting in his hands, but none of the warmth seemed to spread to the rest of his body. He set it down and stared forlornly down at the brown liquid within. Really, what was the point of any of this charade? The getting dressed, drinking coffee, going to work, going home, not sleeping and having to do it all again? What value was any of this? What value was he? He had no one, offered nothing. If he were to just fall out of the world tomorrow, would

anyone even notice?

Draco picked up his mug to gulp down the rest of his drink when the café door swung open and captured his attention. The young woman who had just entered swept some brown hair out of her face, then stopped to adjust a clasp on her bag. Draco's hands began shaking violently as his heart thudded. He quickly set down his mug before his shaking hands caused it to drop and shatter. A cold, sickening, panic coursed through him as Hermione Granger strode confidently to the café counter to place an order.

Hermione fucking Granger.

He was too far away to hear exactly what she said to the barista, but heard her friendly, polite tone, a light laugh, then she received a beverage and offered her thanks.

He could hide. He could bolt, right now, and she wouldn't see him.

Any second now. Any second, Granger would turn slightly and see him. She would see him and scowl. Or maybe her nose would turn up in disgust. Or maybe she would step back in fear. Either way, the second Granger laid eyes on him in a Muggle café, she would have a reaction.

But she was leaving. She walked right out the door, cup in hand and a small, relaxed smile on her face. The smile of someone who had completed the first pleasant stop on their morning routine as they went on their merry way to their fulfilling career.

And she hadn't noticed him.

Draco wasn't sure how he got through his reports that day at work. Before he knew it, it was the end of the work day and he was sitting in front of his dinner at home. More than once that day in his office, his thoughts had drifted to Granger. What was she doing at the coffee shop? *Obviously getting coffee, moron,* his subconscious drawled. Yes, but did she do that often? How did she know about that particular café?

Draco surmised it must be on her way to work. The downtown entrance to the Ministry wasn't far from where he walked to Diagon Alley each morning. She must stop there before work too. But in four years of sitting there almost every week day morning he had never seen her once. And Draco would think he would have noticed Granger. But she hadn't even glanced in his direction.

The next morning, Draco woke after only a few hours of sleep again. Although no nightmares had woken him, he'd been restless all the same. And he couldn't help the curiosity that burned through him. Maybe he should go early for coffee again, just to see what happened.

And there she was. At almost the exact same time as the morning before, Hermione Granger walked in, made polite conversation with the workers behind the counter, received her portable cup, and went on her way without looking at Draco.

Over the weekend, Draco spent more time than he would have liked to admit thinking about Hermione Granger. It was odd, wasn't it, for her to stop into a café in the morning? Surely she was married to Weasley by now and had a litter of horrible-haired children to wrangle in the morning? But she had definitely been wearing formal looking Muggle clothes both mornings and carrying what seemed to be a case for an office. He wracked his brain trying to remember the career highlights of the brightest witch of their age. Something in the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures? That sounded like her, given her odd proclivity for house elf rights.

When Monday morning rolled around, Draco went in early again. He did the same thing for the rest of the work week too.

Most days, Granger was like clockwork. Push open the door, sweep some hair back, walk confidently to the counter. But on two days, Draco could tell she was running late and feeling stressed. Her bag half clasped, hair not tied back as neatly, she half walked/half ran to the counter to gasp out a hurried order before practically sprinting out the door again.

Draco couldn't explain his behavior but had a few theories when he continued to do this earlier routine into the next week. It really came down to curiosity. Just how would Hermione Granger react to his presence? And just how long was it going to take for her to turn her bloody head his way?

It wasn't until his third week of this new pattern that Draco realized this weird little game was the only reason he was getting out of bed in the morning. Some days his gaze practically burned through her as he willed her to just glance over. *Come on Granger, look at me, charge over here all indignant and call me a prat.* Some days he was terrified about what would happen when she did finally see him. Would she recoil in fear and call him a Death Eater? He'd had enough of that reaction from the general public to last him a lifetime, thank you very much.

Though it had been years since he'd had insults, hexes and even drinks thrown at him in public, that wasn't the type of experience one quickly forgot. Time had healed some wounds apparently. He didn't even receive that many Howlers anymore.

With a jolt, Draco remembered that he had seen Granger more than a few times over the years. She was often seen in one of the boxes at Holyhead Harpies quidditch matches. Draco didn't attend many of their games, because they weren't one of the teams on his client roster, but remembered now that the Weasley girl played Chaser for them. It made sense that Granger would attend to support her sister-in-law.

So just how would Hermione Granger react to seeing him? Three weeks in, and Draco still did not have an answer.

When mid-morning hit on Saturday, Draco had a craving for a blueberry scone. He almost never visited his café on the weekend, but since it was a good sign that he had an appetite, he was going to just go with it. The older woman behind the counter made some comment about not usually seeing him on the weekends, and Draco merely shrugged as she smiled and handed him his scone and coffee.

He'd never tell his house elves, but the blueberry scones at this Muggle café were fucking divine, and nothing they tried even came close. He also inwardly cringed at what his mother would say if she knew of his little morning routine. But upon further reflection, Draco decided that she had long ago lost the right to comment on his life choices, especially if she spent most of the year traveling the continent.

Draco turned to head to his usual table and froze. Someone was already sitting there. Sure, there were other empty tables, but that was *his* table. Just as he was debating what kind of magic this situation required, the woman sitting there looked up from her notebook and swept some hair out of her face.

Hermione fucking Granger.

So she had noticed him. She must have, how else would she have known to pick that particular table in this particular coffee shop if not to mentally fuck with him? Breathing heavily through his nostrils, Draco strode angrily up to where she sat.

"Seriously Granger? Do you think this is funny?"

She started at the sound of her name, but it was nothing compared to the shock on her face as she looked up to see who had spoken. Draco realized he'd never seen Hermione look dumbstruck before. The Gryffindor swot who always knew the answer to everything looked positively flummoxed at the sight before her.

The seconds lengthened as he seethed in front of her confused face. She finally seemed to remember that he had spoken to her.

"I'm sorry?"

Draco felt himself deflating a bit, but tried steeling himself once more. He wasn't going to be made into a fool.

"Don't play dumb, Granger, you know this is my table and you're just taking up the space to get under my skin," he hissed.

Why were her brows so infuriatingly knit in confusion? He'd called her on her power play, couldn't she just own up to it already? She was taking an agonizingly long time to supply him with an answer. When she did finally reply, she still seemed to be putting everything together.

"But I don't know what you… but… but this is a Muggle café!" As the words spilled out of her mouth in shock her brain finally seemed to be firing at its usual rate, and her confusion subsided slightly as she responded to his original question.

"Did you just claim this was *your* table, Malfoy?"

Was she bloody deaf? Why did she still have that stupid, befuddled look on her face? He noticed her eyes sweep to either side of him, glance behind him, and then finally back to take in his face, as if checking to see if this was all a mirage or a joke. Well, she was certainly putting up a very good show of looking surprised.

"Yes, *my table,* which you very well know it is, because I sit here every morning!" He wasn't going to back down this easy. But Merlin, was that a little bubble of nostalgia coming to the surface inside him? When was the last time he'd verbally sparred with Hermione Granger?

She set down the writing instrument on her notebook, and Draco noticed now

that the table was covered with several other journals and books. Meeting his level gaze, she narrowed her eyes at him.

"You come here every morning? Are you following me?"

Draco's face went from angered to indignant at her accusation. "Following you? I was here first! I've been coming here every morning before work for the last four years, minding my own business at this very table, which you have now seen fit to taunt me with by sitting at it!"

She snorted. She actually snorted. "Oh grow up Malfoy, no one is taunting you! And for your information, I've been coming here every morning for the past *three* years and haven't seen you once! And it's the weekend! Now I'm not going to even bother to ask why you're frequenting a Muggle establishment or why your paranoid mind thinks I live my life to spite you, but if this *bloody table* means so much to you, I'll just leave!" She huffed as she closed her notebook and made to gather the rest of her things from the table.

With a rapid feeling of dread, Draco knew now that he was such a fucking idiot. He could feel color rushing to his face as he realized what a horrendous mistake he had just made. He had completely and utterly embarrassed himself in front of *Hermione fucking Granger* with a childish argument and not only had he blown his cover, but made a complete ass of himself in front of her in the process. Damn it all, he was going to need to find a new coffee shop after today, preferably on another planet, far away from Granger.

"No Granger, stay. I'll go elsewhere," he muttered and she stopped her rustling. Before she could get a word out, he turned on his heel and walked off to find another seat.

Finding another seat presented itself as another mortifying challenge. For while Draco had wasted time arguing with Hermione over a table, the café had gotten busy with their Saturday, mid-morning rush. There were literally no seats anywhere. Draco was left standing like a prat holding a blueberry scone on a plate and a mug of coffee that was getting colder by the minute.

He glanced back over at Granger. Her head was back down again and she was writing once more. *Fuck it,* he thought, *let's really make this morning interesting. This will probably be my last time here.*

Draco approached her table and stopped short. She must have sensed his presence, because she sighed and looked up.

"And what have I done now to offend you Malfoy?" Her brow was arched warily, and Draco felt that familiar tug of nostalgia once more. How many times back at Hogwarts had she regarded him with that exact, so uniquely *Hermione Granger is hacked off at you* expression?

"Erm, there's nowhere else to sit," he grunted feebly, and gestured his eyes to his plate and cup, showing her why he wanted a table in the first place. Draco watched as her eyes went from his face, to his hands, to the empty chair on the other side of the table, and back up to his face. Her mouth was set in a thin line. He had overstepped, he realized. They weren't old friends. He had no right to approach her like this. To even speak to her. That cold, sinking feeling set in again

as he remembered what he was to her.

"Or I can just go, I didn't mean to - "

She cut him off with an impatient wave of her hand. "Don't be ridiculous Malfoy, here, I'll make some room." She pulled her various notebooks toward her and neatly stacked them on her side of the table. Draco blinked in surprise, but his body moved as if *imperiused*, and before he could even register what he was doing, he had set down his coffee and plate and was seated across from Hermione Granger.

She regarded him impassively for a moment, before opening her notebook and resuming her writing. Draco let out a breath he hadn't realized he was holding and finally sipped his coffee. Silence settled over their table as Hermione's writing tool whizzed across her page. Draco tried not to stare at her, not to think about the absolute absurdity of this situation. But he just couldn't help himself.

They must look so normal to Muggle eyes, the pair of them at this table. Draco eating his scone in two bites, while Hermione busied herself writing. They looked like any other pair of acquaintances, just sitting in a café together. But of course, the truth was so much uglier than that, at least where it concerned Draco.

He pushed the dark thoughts away by staring at the witch across from him. He was halfway through his coffee and hadn't brought any reading material today. Staring at Granger would have to do for entertainment.

He hadn't been this close to her in years. While her hair was much more settled, much neater than it had been in their school days, there was still that inescapable hint of wildness to it despite her having pinned half of it back. She was dressed in a pale pink long-sleeve tee shirt and jeans. The color of her shirt flattered her skin tone. Neat and simple.

The longer he looked, the easier it was to notice the slight darkness under her eyes, the little lines at the edge of her brown eyes and a few at the corners of her mouth. Draco knew she'd more than likely had her share of sleepless nights. But from what? She'd won, hadn't she? Her side victorious, she'd ridden off into the sunset a war heroine in the arms of Weasley, beloved by him, Potter, and the rest of the wizarding world.

No, her facial lines were more likely caused by laughing, smiling, and of tired mornings spent with her children and her husband. But wait, was she married with a family? Draco sorted through memories but couldn't seem to dredge up any surrounding an announcement of her nuptials with the Weasel or any birth notices. Her ring finger was bare, but it would be so like her to be one of those modern witches who didn't wear a wedding band.

"Can I help you with something, Malfoy?"

Shit.

"No, why do you ask?" *Smooth.*

She arched an eyebrow at him, as if the answer were obvious. "Your gaze has been practically burning a hole through my head this entire time."

Draco frowned at her. "It has not. I merely seem to find myself without any reading material this morning and was just thinking."

"About what?"

You. I have a hundred million questions and I'm bored to fucking tears over here.

Instead of answering, he merely shrugged. Hermione rolled her eyes and started rifling through her stack of books and papers.

"Here. I've finished with it already and you can read the quidditch pages." She handed the weekend edition of The Daily Prophet to him. Draco, once again working as if *imperiused*, leaned forward and accepted the paper from her. His brain began screaming at him about the absurdness of the situation, but Draco shut off his thoughts.

Draco quickly scanned the sports section, but it was full of information he already knew. The Prophet was generally a day or so behind his own scouting reports. He was soon bored again. *Fuck it all,* he thought, *I might have to light myself on fire for entertainment.*

And even while his brain kept shouting "don't, don't, just fucking don't!" his mouth never received the signal.

"What are you working on?"

She raised her eyes from the page and looked at him. She regarded him pensively for almost a full minute and Draco felt like he was being evaluated by her personal, internal deduction system. What was she looking for? He didn't break her gaze, as if she were a particularly wrathful Hippogriff, ready to charge at the slightest hint of mal intent. Finally, he must have passed her test, because she cordially replied.

"I'm writing up a report to rebut a particularly ill-informed piece about giants that was printed in Tuesday's Prophet. It was the kind of prejudiced dreck that's going to set my department's efforts back quite a bit."

Draco smirked, because he had been right about her career path. Merlin, was Granger predictable. "So you do work in the Department of Saving All Helpless Creatures, then?"

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Yes, Malfoy. I work in the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures. Though, to be fair, I actually like your name better."

It was Draco's turn to raise an eyebrow. "Oh?"

Granger put down her writing tool, and Draco smiled internally. He was about to be on the receiving end of a Hermione Granger intellectual rant and Merlin, he hadn't felt this normal since his Fifth Year at school.

"Well, think about what the words mean. Regulation. Control. As if these beings don't have powers and wills of their own. It's just pure wizarding arrogance, honestly, to want to control creatures instead of respecting and appreciating them. There is so much we just do not know about the capabilities and habits of magical creatures because wizards have been so intent in learning how to dominate and subdue that they've never bothered with truly understanding the magic that flows through every living thing. The 12 uses for dragon's blood, for example—"

"Granger, I did take Care of Magical Creatures too, you know."

"Yes, and what a wonderful pupil you were in that class," she replied and shot

him a withering glare, but Draco felt himself breaking into a grin.

"My point is, despite the way you were poking fun at my department earlier, I would be more partial to something as saccharine as that, given our current name." She paused to take a sip from the mug in front of her, and Draco wondered what she ordered when she came in every morning.

"And you? You're a talent scout, isn't that right? I've seen you a few times at Ginny's matches."

Draco nodded and noticed as he went to take a sip from his mug that he was just about finished with his drink. His natural reason for remaining at the table was disappearing quickly.

"Yes. I handle the southern part of England mostly, so I don't usually go to Harpies matches."

"You're with that big agency in Diagon Alley, Whisp's and…?"

"Whisp and Wright, named after—"

"Kennilworthy Whisp, the author of *Quidditch Through the Ages* and Bowman Wright, the maker of the first Snitch."

Draco gaped at her. Maybe she wasn't so predictable after all. Was there any piece of knowledge she didn't have tucked away in that gigantic brain of hers? "You've read *Quidditch Through the Ages?*"

"Of course! Not that it's ever helped me on a broom, mind you, but I did learn quite a bit about the history and the rules."

Draco shook his head. "Merlin, Granger, I think the day I hear of a book you haven't read, I may just die of shock."

And then she smiled at him. Hermione Granger smiled at him. There was no impatience or scorn, but genuine amusement at his teasing.

Draco picked up his mug. It was empty now. The charade had ended.

"Well I've got to get going." He didn't. He had nothing and no one waiting for him. Just a long stretch of a weekend most likely spent poring over old family documents. He stood and handed her paper back.

"You said you come here every morning before work?" Hermione asked and he nodded.

"Then I guess I'll see you around, Malfoy." She gave him a tentative, polite smile. The kind you give a work colleague you recognize as you pass in the hall. Draco returned it.